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ABSTRACT

Society's concepts of children, schools, and communities are undergoing significant changes. These changes are reflected prominently in federal and state policy initiatives. Substantive, rather than political, indispensability, may require careful rethinking of school psychology's fundamental identity, training, and practice to match these changes. Psychology currently occupies a prominent role in at least two traditional areas of American education: (1) as a recognized foundation for preservice preparation of teachers and administrators, and (2) through federal legislation mandating psychological assessment of children experiencing difficulties in school to determine eligibility for special education services. However, psychology's continued relevance may depend on adapting to reconceptualized views of children and their problems, along with assumption of leadership in solving these problems. New models of school-based and -linked services will require new ways of delivering services across settings in ways that allow different disciplines and specialties to work in concert rather than in competition. Indispensability in the schools will be predicated on psychology's ability to establish itself as necessary beyond schools, to address complex, child-centered problems with manifestations and necessary intervention across settings and systems. (JBJ)

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Chapter Twelve

Replacing Schools with Children: Making Psychologists Indispensable to Schools *and* Communities

Rick Jay Short

In thinking through what might make psychologists indispensable to schools, it became clear that a simple response would fail to acknowledge the actual complexity of the topic. The idea of making psychologists *indispensable* to schools suggests that they currently are not necessary to schools, and that the task before us is simply to find a way to make us necessary. But the real situation is more complicated. By legislation, expectation, and tradition, psychology already is indispensable in the schools. Decades of advocacy by psychologists and school psychologists have resulted in psychology being essential to, or at least required in, schools right now. Almost every school in the United States has some access to a school psychologist, and some also use other types of psychologists in roles such as research and evaluation, prevention, and treatment. In many cases, this access is required by policy.

Our task is simultaneously broader, more difficult, and more important to children than finding a way to make our services requisite to the schools. After all, making psychologists necessary to schools can be accomplished simply by influencing legislation and policy to mandate our inclusion in schools. Rather, we must discover ways to make our skills so powerful and relevant to solving major problems faced by the nation's schools that they literally can't do without us—not for the benefit of psychology, but to serve children and their families. To do this, we must recognize that society's thinking about children and children's services is changing rapidly. Substantive, rather than political, indispensability may require careful rethinking of our fundamental identity,training, and practice to match these changes.

Where Psychology Already Is Indispensable

Psychology currently occupies a prominent role in at least two traditional areas of American education. At one level, psychology is a prominent and recognized foundation for preservice preparation of teachers and administrators. Psychological principles are the basis for schooling and education, even though that fact often is overlooked in debates of schools and education. Academic psychologists demonstrate the importance of this foundation when they contribute integrally to teacher preparation, and probably could be considered indispensable to undergraduate teacher education. Almost all teacher education programs require coursework in psychological foundations, learning, and development, and these courses typically are taught by professors with doctoral degrees in

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psychology. Although the contribution of psychology to undergraduate teacher preparation is rather indirect in terms of its necessity in American schools, it nonetheless represents a critical element of American education. Accordingly, perhaps one way for psychology to become indispensable to schools is to organize and contribute more fully to preservice preparation of educators.

Another role for psychologists has occupied a more direct and prominent place in America's schools. Since the middle 1970s, federal legislation has mandated psychological assessment of children experiencing difficulties in school to determine eligibility for special education services. America's schools have required psychological services to perform this function, which may account for the growth in employment of school psychologists across in the nation over the last 20 years. Although other disciplines sometimes receive training in some of these procedures, legal mandates in most states require credentialed school psychologists to perform them. At least via legislation, most LEAs are unable to do without us.

School psychology has evolved to be the designated specialty within psychology to provide school-based assessment services. Although most of school psychologists' activities have focused on educational problems, they sometimes have dealt with mental health problems when these problems have influenced school performance. The evolution of special education and school psychology seems to have yielded several characteristics that are common to most school psychology practice. First, school psychologists typically address problems of individuals within school settings. Although many school psychologists have expertise in systemic change and organizational interventions, most of their practice focuses on the needs of individual students in the school. Second, the preponderance of school psychological services are diagnostic in nature. Even though school psychologists receive training in interventions, they probably are trained best for assessment and spend much of their professional time engaged in assessment activities. Third, school psychologists typically operate on problems after they have become sufficiently severe to warrant intervention outside of the classroom (e.g., after referral). Relatively few school psychologists have claimed prevention as their primary job responsibility. And fourth, school psychologists have limited their services to problems of educational performance and mental health. These characteristics represent important adaptations to the traditional needs of schools and have allowed school psychologists to carve out a relatively secure niche in school-based service delivery.

The Mandated Role of School Psychology

School psychology already is indispensable to schools by federal mandate as a diagnostic profession focusing primarily on individual children with special needs. Such a role identity was appropriate given the considerable emphasis on children with special needs of the 60s and 70s, and clearly has produced significant benefits for the profession. School psychology is the only formally recognized and credentialed psychology field for practice in the schools through district- or cooperative-level employment. School psychological services are mandated in most states, and school psychology is specifically listed as a critical component of pupil services in most current education legislation.

However, significant costs also have accrued as a result of this evolution. School psychology has been identified—and has aligned itself—predominantly with special education in the schools. Such narrow alignment has focused the role of school psychologists and ensured through legislation that school psychological services will be provided, although this may change if the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

is reauthorized using the term "psychological services." On the other hand, alignment solely with special education may have resulted in limited opportunities for and identification with broader education, schooling, and children's issues, including education and health care reform. Also, school psychology's evolution away from identification with professional psychology has allowed nondoctoral practice in schools to flourish, but may have limited recognition of school psychologists' parity with other professional psychologists in service delivery outside of the schools. Perhaps most important, identification with special education may have reinforced a setting- and program-based conceptualization of services, rather than a broader child-based focus.

Psychology will continue to be needed to perform both of the above functions in relation to the schools. Psychological foundations of education are essential components of undergraduate teacher preparation and will continue to be required parts of the undergraduate education curriculum. Psychoeducational assessment and diagnosis in the schools will continue to be needed as long as they are mandated by the federal governmentand associated state guidelines. In this regard, psychology may be as indispensable now as many other components of American education. However, continued relevance of and need for psychological services may depend on responsiveness to, and leadership in, national reforms that are changing the face of schooling and children's services.

Recent Changes in Ideas About Children, Families, Schools, and Communities: An Opportunity and Challenge for Psychology

The indispensability of psychology and school psychology to schools may be more fragile now as a result of changing thinking about children and how they should be served. Except for continuing debates about serving children with serious emotional disturbance, school-based special education services have been stable and well defined for a number of years. Even with current Congressional attention on passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, one of the foregrounds of American education seems to have shifted from children with disabilities to several broader, more pressing concerns that may be changing the face of our schools and communities. These concerns, such as violence and substance abuse, clearly have potent effects on schools and learning, yet probably are beyond the power and resources of schools to solve by themselves.

American policy makers may be engaged in a dramatic revision of their ideas about children and children's services. Over many years, state and federal agencies developed a bureaucratic conception of the child as a set of components, each of which could be served effectively by a different agency. Accordingly, schools served the educational component (called "student"), medical units addressed the health component (called "patient"), parents assumed overall responsibility and took care of the developmental component (called "son" or "daughter"), and so on. The primary emphasis in this conceptualization was on the particular services provided by each agency to that part of the child which was its domain. Although some overlap of responsibility was apparent, the general conceptualization of child-as-components encouraged a focus on parts of children rather than whole children and militated against collaboration or shared responsibility. Often, each agency's responsibility for its part of the child was guarded jealously in order to protect resources and ensure viability. Different segments of a child's life and development were held as being separate, with little recognition of or contact with other segments. From this perspective, the school part of the child had an existence that intersected only marginally with other facets of his/her life (at least, to the school). Although this

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view of children obviously was difficult to support through research on or theories of childhood and adolescence, it provided a functional and elegant division of labor for state and federal agencies to address their domains of responsibility.

However, complex and often intractable social problems facing schools and communities have forced educators and policy makers to rethink this view, from children-as-components to children (and families) as whole units. Such a reconceptualization moved the emphasis of service delivery from what services agencies provide in their domains and the setting in which they are provided to what services children need. Child and family units assumed centrality over settings and isolated services of agencies. The need for this rethinking has become obvious as policy makers have recognized that most problems of childhood, such as violence, substance abuse, and failure to complete school, have both causes and effects that reverberate through the entire existence of children and families. For example, some school characteristics have been identified as correlates of substance abuse, which has a dramatic effect on performance in school. However, precursors and outcomes of substance abuse also clearly interact with families, peer relationships, and communities. This complex interaction of correlates andoutcomes, common to most problems of childhood, has necessitated a comprehensive, child-centered framework that extends across settings in an integrated manner.

In response to reconceptualization of children and their needs, the nation's policy makers also have revised their conceptualization of services to children. Writers in children's services have noted for several decades now that the problems of children and families are extremely complex, and may be becoming increasingly difficult as society becomes more complicated. Increasing complexity will require a shift to a more comprehensive view of children's needs, which will require greater integration and collaboration among agencies and professions to meet the needs of today's youth. Services integration requires new skills as well as a reconceptualization of our place in service to America's children and youth. The buzz words of "collaborative" and "teaming" suggest that in order to meet adequately the *comprehensive* needs of children, we must partner intraprofessionally, interprofessionally, and across systems (schools, community mental health, juvenile justice, health services, etc.) in an integrated, child-centered way. New models of school-based and -linked as well as community-based and -linked services will require new ways of delivering services across settings in ways that allow different disciplines and specialties to work in concert rather than in competition.

Rethinking Psychology to Address Reformed Policy on Children and Children's Services

To be indispensable to schools of the future, psychologists must take into account both the problems schools must deal with and changes in conceptualization of services. At least part of adapting to the changing needs of schools will need to include a move beyond the limitations of child-as-components, setting-based thinking about services to a whole-child, child-centric perspective on service delivery. Such psychological services to children and their families—including services to and in the schools—must reflect change to meet the demands of the above reconceptualizations (Talley & Short, 1994). New ideas about services to children constitute perhaps the best opportunity in many years to redefine psychological service delivery to schools and communities (Talley & Short, 1996). In any case, reformed service delivery will require integrated communication and services across many community agencies, including the schools. To be truly indispensable to schools of the future, psychologists must become indispensable to the entire community within which the school is embedded.

One important accommodation to reconceptualized children's services lies in the area of identity. The current status of psychology related to the schools reflects a clear dichotomy of identity, in which ongoing school-based psychological services are identified primarily with school psychologists and ancillary or community-based services are associated with other professional specializations in psychology. This division of professional identity was functional as long as children's educational needs (for which the schools were responsible) were viewed as separate from other facets of their existence (which were the responsibility of other agencies). School psychologists served the school child, and other psychologists in other settings served other parts of the child. Recognition of the complex and interrelated nature of children's needs, coupled with acknowledgment of the need for comprehensive, integrated services to meet these needs, may have rendered setting-based notions of professional identity obsolete. Although schools will continue to constitute a primary service delivery site for children, service providers may need to identify their clients as children and their families, and frame their identity to extend wherever their services are needed. Particularly at the doctoral level, the identity of school psychology should extend beyond setting to reflect the broad range of skills and competencies—systemic and individual—that most doctoral school psychologists possess. It may be that we should consider calling doctoral psychology that serves schools, children, youth, and families something other than school psychology, although the school component should remain prominent.

In addition to identity, training and practice in professional psychology for children and families may need to change to ensure indispensability to reconceptualized schools and communities. Training and practice in school psychology typically has focused on facets of children's problems (e.g., learning, discipline) that are most evident in schools, but has dealt less thoroughly with other, equally-critical aspects of these same problems (e.g., family factors). Conversely, other professional specializations in child psychology have prepared their practitioners to address extra-school components of children, but have neglected school functioning. To address whole-child needs in an integrated manner, training and practice in child psychology should provide expertise to allow a comprehensive frame of child functioning, along with fluid service provision across settings. At the least, training and practice should include educational, mental health, public health, integrated systems, and primary health competencies.

Because traditional school psychology remains critical to special education evaluation and diagnosis, it should continue to serve as an essential core for all psychologists that provide reconceptualized services. Accordingly, training in what we have called "professional child psychology" (as we have elsewhere called such reconceptualized, comprehensive psychological services) should subsume credentialable school psychology in its core, and all doctoral psychologists within this larger specialization should be required to be credentialable in school psychology. Thus, the first two years of a doctoral program in psychology would constitute quality preparation in school psychology (Short & Talley, 1995). Subsequent training and education would move away from school psychology in both identity and content. In this way, school psychology credentialing needs would always be filled, but unique and relevant skills to meet the comprehensive needs of children in schools and communities would be added. Also, practice in professional child psychology might be based in the schools or school-linked, but in either case would extend beyond organizational boundaries to identify and meet whole-child and family needs.

A basic premise of this chapter is that society's concepts of children, schools, and communities

are undergoing significant changes. These changes are reflected prominently in federal and state policy initiatives. Although psychology always has occupied an important place in children's services, its continued relevance may depend on adapting to reconceptualized views of children and their problems, along with assumption of leadership in solving these problems. Substantive indispensability in the schools will be predicated on psychology's ability to establish itself as necessary *beyond* schools, to address complex, child-centered problems with manifestations and necessary interventions across settings and systems.

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